Seasideness: sense of place at a seaside resort.

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Introduction

British seaside resorts are associated with the birth of mass tourism and are amongst the most significant leisure spaces since industrialisation. Despite sliding down the expanding leisure 'consumption spaces hierarchy' within the later decades of the twentieth century (Urry 1997: 104), they are still significant leisure resources and are a durable element of British culture (Tunstall and Penning-Rowsell 1998). Whilst the British seaside is often associated with decline, Walton (2000) suggests that observers should instead try to explain its survival. With this in mind, it is perhaps surprising that the motivation of modern day seaside visitors has not attracted more attention from academics. Indeed Tunstall and Penning-Rowsell (1998: 331) call for further qualitative research in this area to, 'deepen our understanding of individuals' lifelong experiences of coasts, and the meanings they attach to them'.

This chapter is concerned with the sense of place experienced by visitors to a traditional British seaside resort. More specifically it adopts a case-study approach through focusing on the traditional resort of Morecambe in Lancashire, which is introduced in the following pages. The primary research involves semi-structured in-depth interviews with a small purposive sample of 55-74 year old visitors from the North of England, reflecting the resort's visitor demographics (Gibson, Crawford and Geddes, 2008; Locum and Arkenford, 2006).

This research suggests a seaside resort sense of place, introduced here as *seasideness,* which is influenced by socio-cultural elements and the perceived characteristics of blue space. Blue space refers to sea in this case, the term is used by Environmental Psychologists to refer aquatic environments (White, Smith, Humphryes, Pahl, Snelling and Depledge 2010). This place based research suggests that the sea is the main attraction; furthermore it shapes and dominates the visitor experience in a variety of ways. The visitors value these seaside experiences and associate them with nostalgia, wellness and spirituality which lie at the heart of seasideness. These associations and meanings result from interpretation and

characterization of the sea and coastal environment. These rather romantic readings of the sea feed into and shape seasideness. The most relevant of these characteristics are divided into the following four sections:

- The Picturesque and Sublime
- Dynamic and powerful sea
- The sea, vastness and awe
- The timeless sea

Morecambe is a detoriated resort facing various socio-economic and image related challenges, so the link to the sublime may not be obvious for many. Yet one must remember that the main activity of these visitors, as confirmed in the interviews, was walking down the regenerated promenade and looking out to the Irish Sea or across the second largest bay in England to the hills of the Lake District. The characteristcs listed above clearly reflect the interviewee's perceptions of the coastal environment; sensing blue space lies at the heart of their sense of place. Before discussing this further, Morecambe, the underpinning research and seasideness are introduced in turn.

Morecambe: a brief history

The setting for this research is Morecambe, Lancashire, England, a traditional seaside resort (population 39,000). It developed in the nineteenth century and expanded rapidly in the early twentieth century into a popular medium-sized resort. In the decades following a brief post-World War Two boom, decline set in. The once popular resort went on to experience a dramatic fall in visitor numbers and sustained loss of attractions, touristic infrastructure and reputation. By the early 1980s it was obvious that the resort's tourism economy had been transformed, 'Morecambe suffered a calamitous fall in visitor spending from £46.6 million in 1973 to £6.5 million in 1990, expressed in constant values. Few resorts have suffered such a collapse' (Hassan 2003: 254). The resort lost its two piers, a variety of indoor attractions such

as The Winter Gardens and in the 1980s it could not even offer a cinema (Bingham 1990). The resort became associated with a number of enduring socio-economic problems, not least unemployment and poverty. The 1990s saw a partial recovery from the lows of the 1980s, as parts of the resort and especially the promenade saw regeneration (see Figures and 1 and 2). However recovery was slow to gather momentum, inconsistent and not helped by the closure of the swimming pool and then Frontier Land theme park - the last significant man-made tourist attraction in the resort. The interviewees in this study suggested that Morecambe was divided between the regenerated coastal area (notably the promenade) which they visited and the rest of the town, which they did not. This divide was confirmed in the 2012 Morecambe Area Action Plan (Lancaster City Council 2012).

The resort has an enduring image problem dating at least as far back as mid-1970s and the jokes of Colin Crompton, a popular comedian of the time. He dubbed the resort the 'Costa Geriatrica', where 'they don't bury the dead but just prop them up in bus shelters' (Bingham 1990: 273). In 2003 Morecambe was the inspiration for a popular book called 'Crap Towns: The 50 Worst Places to Live in the UK' in which the resort was awarded third place behind Kingston upon Hull and Cumbernauld (Jordison 2013). For some years now resorts such as Morecambe have signified poor taste (Urry 1997).

Yet British seaside resorts are a resilient social construction (Ward and Hardy 1986) and have a long tradition of re-invention (see Walton 2000). Over the last fifteen years or so visitor numbers in Morecambe, especially along the coastal area, have steadily increased (Lancaster City Council 2011, Trotman 2007). The destination Midland Hotel was reopened by Urban Splash in 2008, to become a beacon of hope for the resort. Along with the promenade it represented a rare significant investment in the touristic infrastructure and the re-opening of this art-deco hotel drew media attention to Morecambe (BBC2 2007). Even the author of 'Crap Towns' concedes that the resort has greatly improved (Jordison 2013). However some have pointed out that recovery in Morecambe has stalled in the aftermath of the economic crisis (Harris and Domokos 2011). For further discussion on the flow and ebb of the tourism economy in Morecambe or the British seaside refer to Bingham (1990), Walton (2000) and Beatty and Fothergill (2003). The resort has been a victim of

socio-cultural shifts, economic forces and life-cycle (Butler 1980) but Morecambe, has survived as a functioning resort that still attracts visitors.

Figure 1 - Morecambe Promenade: the beach, the 'new' promenade and car parks which off Marine Road which runs along the coast.

(Image source: Martin 2012)

Figure 2: The Stone Jetty and looking out across Morecambe Bay– along with the promenade it has been transformed by the Tern Project in the 1990s and represents one of the main reasons to visit the resort.

(Image source: Gateway 2 the Lakes 2012).

Method

This primary research aimed to uncover a sense of place at the modern day seaside, which is lacking from the literature indeed there is relatively little work on sense of place and tourists more generally (Kyle and Chick 2007). Research was completed in 2012 and focused on leisure visitors to Morecambe. More specifically, the aim of the research was to establish if a seaside sense of place, referred to and introduced here as seasideness, existed amongst these visitors to Morecambe, and if so what form it took.

In-depth semi-structured visitor interviews, utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (or IPA), were conducted. Interviewees were asked about their experiences and motivations as visitors to Morecambe. IPA is a systematic form of analysis that lends itself to particular forms of information collection, notably in-depth semi-structured interviews, and small sample sizes (see Howitt 2010; Howitt and Cramer 2011; Shaw 2010; Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009; Smith and Osbourn 2008). IPA allows the texture of individual experience to be revealed.

The sample was chosen to reflect Smith et al's (2009) observation that the ideal IPA sample is small, homogeneous and will find the research question meaningful. Indeed, within IPA purposive homogeneous sampling is vital, if one is to probe with sufficient depth to represent a specific perspective or type of experience (as opposed to a population). Visitors to Morecambe hotels and cafes were asked to fill in their details as part of a scoping survey, the main aim of which was to identify suitable respondents for interview. The final sample, of ten participants, was decided through the application of three screens; these ten interviewees were aged 55 to 74 years, resided in the North of England (more specifically Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire and Cumbria) and were repeat visitors to Morecambe. These three screens were based around the 'average' visitor to Morecambe in terms of demographics and visiting habits, according to research carried out for the public sector (Gibson, Crawford and Geddes 2008; Locum and Arkenford 2006). The split of the interviewees by gender, retired or working and socio-economic class (i.e. between *working class* and *middle class* based on (ex) occupations) was 50% in each case.

Interviewees were put at ease to build their confidence before conducting the interview; for instance location was decided by the interviewee, often at their home. These recorded in-depth interviews were fully transcribed verbatim.

This chapter discusses the main relevant themes that emerged from the interviews and includes a selection of quotes from the interviewees that best demonstrate said themes. These quotes from the interviews are in *italics* in order to avoid confusion.

Seasideness: the seaside experience at Morecambe

Relph (1976) identified three key aspects to place: the physical characteristics of the environment, the meaning of place – associations, memories, connotations, denotations and so on – and, finally, the activities afforded by the place, including the social interactions associated with the place (Turner and Turner 2006). Over the years, these three dimensions have been refined by other scholars and have informed later definitions of sense of place (see Patterson and Williams 2005). Contemporary Human Geography considers place to be diverse, conflicted and constructed (see Creswell 2013). Geographers refer to sense of place as the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place (Creswell 2004); the following definition is as clear and relevant to this chapter as any,

> The term 'Sense of Place' is often used to describe your feelings for a place, and the elements that make that place special to you – it may be memories of past visits, views, sounds, people, tastes, even the smell of the place! (Forest of Bowland AONB n/d)

Therefore sense of place is when place identity is significant enough to be felt or experienced. Issues of identity permeate the study of leisure places (for instance Aitchinson, Macleod and Shaw 2002; Williams 2002). Furthermore spaces that are percieved as natural can be considered a blank canvass onto which one can paint oneself (Preston-Whyte 2004, Gayton 1996). Any such perceptions of place or space, including the sea, are of course socially and culturally constructed and should not be considered permanent or fixed (see Corbin 1994).

The seaside specific sense of place, experienced at Morecambe by these

interviewees, is referred to here as seasideness. The most significant and strongly expressed of these seaside meanings centred on the following themes:

- wellness / restoration
- spirituality / re-connection
- nostalgia / childhood

All of these themes were inter-connected with each other and connected to the seaside environment. The sea and its perceived characteristics could be described as informing or even dominating the seaside experience and the associated meanings listed above. Morecambe's coastal strip was important to the interviewees; to experience this natural attraction or environment was the main reason to visit.

The interviews clearly indicate that senses are intensely engaged at the seaside. Breathing in fresh sea air, smelling the sea, feeling the wind, hearing the waves and looking out across the Bay and out to sea lie at the heart of the seaside experience in Morecambe. The interviewees tended to bundle the senses together, for instance they associated seaside smells and sounds with the movement of the sea, as well as relaxation.

> *I think it's the smell of the sea air, and the noise of the waves, or just the rippling of the water.*

Sea views were mentioned frequently and whilst these descriptions tended to be ocular-centric, they often encompassed other senses too. We move past the Tourist Gaze (Urry 1990) and even the smell-scape (Dann and Jacobsen 2003) to a holistic seaside experience which relates directly to a variety of feelings including touch (Obrador-Pons 2007/2009). These observations mirror Crouch's (2013: 18) words on landscape,

> But what do we *do* in relation with landscape: do we just gaze at it? Almost certainly not. We feel it; or at least we feel something in our relationship with 'it'. Treading, smelling, turning and feeling the sense of space, open or closed-in; touching a leaf, a building's stone: a kaleidoscope of sense and feelings, not a spectatorial detached gaze as though we were some trainee surveyor.

> We participate, are involved in landscape. Our emotions and feelings happen in the round; qualitatively; subjectively.

Various cultural signifiers are associated with Morecambe and the British seaside. The built environment is an important element of this; it was considered an old fashioned place that is rich in tradition. The Bed and Breakfasts, ice-cream parlors, amusement arcades and the promenade informed seasidness, personal nostalgia, collective nostalgia and even national identity. Play on the beach was perhaps the richest source of reminisence. For the interviewees, cultural signifiers of the seaside and memory are intertwined:

> *You know, that I think a lot of people sort of my age in a way, remember about the seaside, would be the typical visit to the seaside, spending time on the beach, the ice cream, the building sand castles…*

Such cultural signifiers are common across most traditional British seaside resorts, just as the sea itself is. Indeed the most significant and distinctive aspect of seaside visits to Morecambe are the sights, smells and sounds of the sea and the way they make one feel. Similar experiences can be had in other resorts. One potential consequence of this is an inter-changeability or transferability of seaside experiences. Interviewees tended to make little distinction between resorts, treating them all as '*seaside days'*. A transferable seasideness appears at least as important as any resort-specific sense of place.

> *…there is a bit of a blueprint, there are certain things that make a seaside a seaside.*
>
> *I mean to me the seaside is, as the name implies, it's the seaside. And I don't think it matters too much where you are…*

Visitors tended to refer to the traditional built seaside environment in generic terms, however these references were ocassionally punctuated by specific reference to The Midland Hotel or other local landmarks. These informed Morecambe's sense of place which in turn fed into a more transferable seasideness. Exactly which resorts are interchangeable and to what extent is questionable.

Whilst culture and heritage defines and characterises seasideness, so does the sea itself. This ubiquitous blue space is described and characterised in a number of different ways by interviewees but four clear themes, or pairs of themes, emerge. The sea related themes are: picturesque and sublime, dynamic and powerful vast and awe inspiring, and timeless and unchanging. These are now considered in turn and in doing so the core elements of seasideness (wellness, spirituality and nostalgia) are discussed along the way, in order to explore the relationships between these four themes and seasideness.

The Picturesque and Sublime

The view out to sea or across the bay is described more often and in much more emotive terms than any other physical aspect of the resort. Interviewees even express an attachment towards the seascape itself as demonstrated in the interview excerpt below, which is an example of building a positive relationship with place as recognised by Tuan (1977).

> *But I think it's also the fact that you look across that bay, particularly on a summer's evening when the sun's going down, and, and it's over the bay and there's such beautiful sunsets and beautiful views that you can't help but, but be, be attracted to it and can't help but be affected by it. And I think this is what sort of happened over the years – I think it's turned much more into that, into the, the serenity and, and the, the…the love of that view...*

Interviewees focus on the importance of seeing the sea on holiday. Visual consumption of romantic vistas is an important aspect of the tourist's seaside experience:

> *I think probably all the time actually my eye would be drawn out to sea. And I couldn't really say why. It's just a nice feeling to look out to sea. I think everybody does, especially, you know, when you're there at the seaside. Probably one of my favourite spots would be right out at the end of the stone jetty, because you can just look out.*

The interviewees designate Morecambe Bay as '*picturesque'* or '*beautiful*' and *'sublime'.* These words have been associated with landscapes throughout the industrial and post-industrial phases of Britain's history (Aitchison, Macleod and

Shaw 2002). The term landscape suggests a natural scene that has been framed by the agency of human perspective. The traditions of the picturesque are especially associated with framing however the tradition of the sublime was somewhat different in that it relied on boundaries (Aitchison et al 2002). Punter (1994: 223) explains this difference, 'The Picturesque frames roughness and variety; the Sublime has to do with being overwhelmed, surprised, being taken out of one's frame by a scene'. Sublime landscapes and seascapes still serve their purpose of putting things into perspective and us in our place, 'Sublime landscapes, through their grandeur and power, retain a symbolic role in bringing us to accept without bitterness or lamentation the obstacles we cannot overcome and events we cannot make sense of' (De Botton 2002: 178).

This seaside environment was interpreted in such a way as to allow a sublime experience. Descriptions of looking out at the view and experiencing the seaside in the interviews were often the pre-cursors to observations regarding their lives, their place in the world and spirituality. In other words, the interviewees display a feeling of expanded thought through experiencing '*nature*' and blue space. This feeling and a potential connection through awe, as well as other milder emotions, can be traced at least as far back as the work of Edmund Burke's 1756 writings on the sublime (Burke 2001). The sublime offers a potential umbrella term for all of these aspects of the sea: the powerful, dynamic, vast, awesome, time-less and primeval. Schopenhauer developed Burke's concepts by producing a type of sliding scale between the beautiful to fully sublime. As one moves through the scale one becomes more aware of one's own fragility and the object appears more antagonistic (see Schopenhauer 2010: xxxi). Most interviewees made comments which would register on the more sublime half of such a scale. Parallel observations regarding the postivie and potentially awe inspiring reactions to the environment can be seen with another IPA-based study which took place in the Scottish wilderness (Hinds 2011).

Dynamic and powerful sea

The sea follows a number of cycles and is seemingly in a constant state of flux. Six interviewees refer to these dynamic aspects of the seaside environment. These constantly changing features are seen as fascinating, beautiful and appealing in their own right. Movement is of central importance to this:

> *And I think with me there's a fascination with the sea, with the water, it's something that always attracts me, just the fact that it keeps moving, going out and moving and coming back.*

Running alongside these observations of a dynamic environment is the theme of the powerful *sea.*

> *Well it's like, it's almost like a wild animal isn't it? Like you could be looking at a tiger in a zoo and thinking how wonderful it is and how you feel this love for it, but yet it's completely unapproachable and you know it's untameable and it's.....a force to be reckoned with.....*

The interviewees describe the sea as powerful and dynamic. It is dynamic because it is considered ever changing through the fast changing tides, weather, storms, seasons and light conditions. These movements, patterns and forces were described as beautiful, intriguing and out of our hands, thereby underpinning to the idea of a powerful sea. It is perhaps this dual perception of the powerful and picturesque that makes the sea so fascinating and appealing.

The descriptions offered by the interviewees are reminiscient of those of pathos and sublimity from earlier centuries as described by Corbin (1994). He points out that the powerful sea became a source of hope precisely because it inspired fear. In facing the sea one faced one's personal perils, thereby overcoming the anxieties associated with urban society and re-establishing harmony between body and soul (Corbin 1994). Our views of the seaside may have moved on from those of the eighteenth-century (Ryan 2002; Shields 1991) but for one interviewee the restorative appeal was still bound to her fear of the sea:

> *You know because it's so vast and scary. It's like out of space almost isn't it?*

The sea, vastness and awe

Some interviewees refer specifically to awe, whilst others referred to vastness as thought provoking and powerful but did specifically use this word. These two themes blend into one and in many cases would be difficult to separate. Indeed, awe has been defined as the combination of 'perceived vastness and accommodation' (Keltner and Haidt 2003: 303). Accommodation here refers to the adjusting of mental structures that cannot assimilate a new experience. To be awe stuck is to experience reverence to something much more powerful or vast than oneself. In the context of landscape or seascape, the natural environment would usually demonstrate this power through its vastness and/or severity. For a moment, we connect with something far greater than us, we feel part of something bigger and at the same time humbled and potentially changed by it. Vastness puts things into perspective and puts us in our place.

Interviewees consider visiting the sea to be a potentially powerful experience; they comment on its vastness and see it as awe-inspiring. All seven of the interviewees who made such comments found the openness and vast outlook of the seaside to be thought provoking and appealing. This appeal took slightly different forms; vastness was associated with nature, the elements and beauty for the most part but also curiosity and imagining what lies *on the other side*, travel and the past:

> *But, I mean, so you can have a feeling of distance and thinking about what it's like on the other side of what you can see so it kind of opens up your imagination.*

Two interviewees specifically use the adjective '*awesome'* (in the correct sense of the word). They linked the awesome nature of the sea to our place in the world and creation. The awesome nature of the sea is a comfort, an assurance that there is something bigger out there:

> *...because I mean when you're in it yourself, you know, you're just like a tiny little speck and a wave and all these huge rollers coming in and different tides and, you know, it does make you feel, you know creation, well to me I just feel it's very peaceful and, you know, sort of quite awesome really.*

…so when I go to Morecambe you can look out, so it's unrestricted. And then you look across the bay and you look across at the… to the far side, and you begin to see the Lakeland hills and so on. And then I begin to think, I put on my dog collar and I begin to think about God and about creation.

Indeed, many of the quotes concerning scale and vastness, as can be seen above, should be read as containing spiritual connotations. To be more specific, their imaginations ran free, they considered travel to another place far away, the source of this vast space and the distant past. Notably the sea still represents something of a mystery of what lies on the other side; the unknown and freedom. Vastness is clearly one of the unique features of this environment which underpins its spiritual significance or, at the very least, a uniquely contemplative sense of place. One reason for this may be that the information-processing demands are much less in this environment, when compared to an urban environment where levels of sensory stimulation can be overwhelming (Akhurst 2010). These observations regarding vastness clearly inform the earlier discussion on the Sublime and the Beautiful, although in the research they did emerge as separate seaside characteristics in the eyes of the interviewees.

Bull's (2006) conceptual overview of coastal spirituality is relevant to this study. His focus seems to be secular spirituality that sits outside, but does not necessarily contradict or exclude, formalised religion. His work clearly demonstrates various relevant interpretations of spirituality at the coast and potentially it provides a useful framework. Bull postulates the inherent influences over the spiritual draw of the sea, identifying four sets of such influences:

Spiritual and physical well-being
Correspondence of the sea's rhythms to life rhythms

Freedom of the limitless
The beach as liminality, safe margin to view the seascape

Adventure and daring
Regression to childhood

Return to the womb, or pre-terrestriality
Surrender to great spiritual power (Bull 2006)

Lencek and Bosker (1998: 97) observe that Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge and Byron 'sensed in the vast organic entity of the sea the same amalgam of spirit that stirred in the depths of the human soul.' The sea as a metaphor for something equally as deep can be seen in the 1851 novel Moby Dick, Ishmael observes, 'there is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seems to speak of some hidden soul beneath' (Melville 2002: 397). Notably, a connection between the vastness of seascapes and our soul was later explored by Bachelard (1994). He saw a connection between the immensity and limitlessness of the seas and the depth of inner space within us all, a void connecting with a void. This connection is perhaps best expressed in The Wasteland:

On Margate Sands.

I can connect

Nothing with nothing. (Eliot 1922: 300)

When one looks at both nothing and a hidden world at the same time, one's spirit can no longer remain 'sealed or indivisible' (Bachelard 1994: 206). To Bachelard and countless post-Renaissance poets, artists and authors, the sea tells us something about ourselves.

The timeless sea

The interviewees make a number of connections between time and the seaside. For instance, the experience of being by the sea goes hand in hand with leisure time, the seaside holiday being framed and given meaning by space and time. More striking though was the fact that this environment is associated with timelessness, that is standing outside of the normal notions of time. Interviewees tend to describe the

seaside as '*unchanging'* and '*timeless'*; the seaside environment is reassuring and potentially contrasts with change as they experience it in their own lives. In this sense it provides a constant, a timeless and unchanging backdrop to whatever human activity takes place on its shores. The seaside is also place of expanded thought, so the interviewees' reflections on time should come as no surprise.

The timeless seaside environment contrasts sharply with the frenetic pace of modernity, the pressures of work and the nature of modern life. Relph recognised precisely this phenomenon, which he links to place attachment: 'The feeling that this place has endured and will persist as a distinctive entity even though the world around may change' (Relph 1976: 31). The unchanging seaside offered an opportunity to put things in perspective in terms of time, to tune into a natural rhythm of waves and tides and essentially to slow down (see Baerenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen and Urry 2004). This is one reason why the seaside is seen as reassuring, calming and relaxing. These observations are reflected in these interviewees' statements:

> *...And to be able to look at something that is unchanging, and for all intents and purposes will always be like that, maybe it's a little bit… has a calming effect, you know, to see that something won't change. Mankind's changing so much.*
>
> *...it takes your mind completely away from all our sort of manmade hustle and bustle. It takes you right back to nature really doesn't it?*

Interviewees considered the seaside experience to be good for them, a time to relax. One interviewee observed that these visits made him, '*feel ten years younger'*. Natural environments have been linked to restorativeness and health by academics in recent years (for example Bell, Fisher, Baum and Greene 2006). Even more recently, startling associations between the coastal environment and health have been correlated (see White et al 2010; Ashbullby, White, Pahl and Depledge 2012).

The seaside sits outside of time as we see it – unchanged, unchanging except for its own cycles. The seaside offers both a re-connection with nature and our past or origins. Two interviewees even used the word '*primeval*' to describe the sea and suggest an evolutionary aspect to this bond:

Whether it's a sort of a primeval thing where they say that we came from the sea I don't know, but it's that sort of a feeling.

Nostalgia is a significant aspect of seasideness; it is associated with childhood, play and issues of identity. Re-visiting this place with its distinct sights and smells tends to be a nostalgic experience of the sort we might associate with Proust (1984). The interviews indicate that the timeless seaside made the perfect backdrop for nostalgia.

I think it [looking at the views] *does take me back to, you know, to years gone by when I used to go for a walk along the prom with, with mum and dad...*

It's... I think the bay is just spectacular, it's just beautiful. And I always feel... I always feel very nostalgic when I go to Morecambe.

Interviewees tended to describe their childhood family holidays in great detail. They saw the beach and sea as unchanging thereby highlighting changes in the wider world and especially childhood. There was a sense that childhood itself had changed with modern day children having higher expectations but less freedom and independence in terms of play. Others saw these virtues as intact on the beach, which was a refuge of timeless childhood play, but this highlighted wider socio-cultural change.

I do believe that a beach gives freedoms that aren't necessarily there in the way that we live these days.

Seaside nostalgia and issues of identity operated on personal and collective levels, some which were much less directly related to timelessness. Notably, the physical coastline itself and seaside culture at traditional resorts appeared to inform Britishness; a seaside visit was described as a '*Very British thing to do'*. Images associated with the seaside are instantly recognisable as 'part of England's collective consciousness's, our folk memory' (Elborough 2010: 7) and they reinforce the self-image of an island nation.

So the time-less (sea) is a constant by which to compare our own lives (Relph 1976). Nostalgia is a clear and significant manifestation of this comparison and would make a fascinating area for future research. However the sea was also viewed as standing outside of the modern world in the sense that it is traditional and ancient; it was associated with our historic and pre-historic past. The *'primeval'* sea was even associated with our evolutionary past by the interviewees in the form of some genetic memory (Ryan 2002) which may link to a much more distant past (see Morgan 2009). However one explains this phenomenon, people seem naturally drawn to the timeless and our perception of time affects sense of place.

Conclusion

The seaside can be characterised as a culture-nature interface (Preston-Whyte 2004). Sense of Place, as discussed in this chapter, is informed by the perceived characteristics of blue space, the sea itself. These are beauty/picturesque, dynamic/powerful, vastness/awe and the timeless sea. Of course the senses, which are very much engaged at the seaside, are central to these perceptions and also lie at the heart of seasideness. The sea is not only a contributory factor to sense of place, it was in the object to which interviewees felt attachment to, at least as much as to the town itself. For the interviewees the seaside resort (in this case Morecambe) is the place which facilitates access to one of the most uninterrupted and pure forms of space available. Access to this environment is considered beneficial by individuals and much valued by them.

Issues of identity as they relate to place pervade the findings of this research and indeed the study of leisure places more generally (Aitchinson et al 2002; Williams 2002). In this case place identity is partly a reflection of a transferable and more generic seaside identity rather than something more specific to Morecambe. In a similar fashion, the interviews reveal an attachment to the seaside but only a limited attachment to the resort of Morecambe specifically. Indeed places more generally are a reflection of relationships and connections with other places (Massey 1993). The attachment to the seaside was very much intertwined with place identity but

place dependence was similarly affected; visitors depended on the seaside more than one might expect – spiritually, physiologically and psychologically. This is in alignment with the psychological benefit suggested by Tuan (1977), when a person achieves a balance between what can he called place and a space. It should be remembered that space and place are socio-culturally constructed, constantly changing, relational and not always easily distinguished (Creswell 2013, Massey 1993). Nevertheless for generations the seaside environment offered wide open spaces to visitors has been associated with well-being in some form (see Hassan 2003 for a full discussion on this topic). Recently academics have established clear links between natural environments and the sea to health and well-being (Ashbullby et al 2012; Akhurst 2010; Bell, Fisher, Baum and Greene 2006; and White et al 2010).

Within leisure studies it has been recognised for some time that visitors value their relationships with leisure places (see Williams 2002) and the interviewees certainly value and even depend on their seaside visits. Yet these same visitors are not necessarily tied to or dependent on a specific resort. Another seaside resort would do because, as one of the interviewees put it, *'if you are at the seaside you're at the seaside'*. This would suggest that the range of other traditional resorts available, their perceived social desirability, issues of access and other considerations would be likely to dictate destination choice as long as they all offer blue space and a shoreline where children, the inner child or memory can be free and at play. Other resorts with more complete touristic infrastructures and different reputations may be able to offer something of the Carnivalesque too, which was noticeably absent in the sense of place for Morecambe as explored in this research.

Seasideness contains socio-cultural elements and is based on primary research associated with one traditional British resort; it is likely to vary between cultures, regions, resorts and socio-demographic groups. However at its centre lies a relationship with, or interpretation of, blue space which is likely to contain elements that reach across a wide range of people(s). Natural landscapes can 'often act as blank canvases into which we paint, and define, ourselves' (Gayton 1996: 55) and

this is true for the coastline too (Preston-Whyte 2004). The seaside environment offers uninterrupted space, vastness and potential sublimity more completely than almost any landscape. We take what we need or desire from this environment. The Interviewees desired access to blue space and an associated reconnection between the vast bay or seemingly endless sea and that which lies beyond easy reach; an external power, the past, and something or someone that stirs within.

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